



THE LONDON SCHOOL
OF ECONOMICS AND
POLITICAL SCIENCE ■

Course Code: SP201 Research Methods for Social Policy

QUALTATIVE RESEARCH PROJECT

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Bridging the Gap: 18- to 21-Year-Olds' Perspectives on Reforming Citizenship Education in England

1. Introduction

Citizenship education, as a district school subject, equips students with the knowledge they need for informed democratic participation. The Crick Report (1998) envisioned citizenship education as a means of promoting civic morality, community involvement, and political literacy. By introducing it as a statutory subject for 11- to 16-year-olds, the aim was to equip students with the tools needed for active democratic participation. However, the 2014 National Curriculum Review removed this structure, replacing it with a vague focus on "British Values." This shift has raised serious concerns about whether today's curriculum can still prepare young people for meaningful political engagement. The Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study (CELS) adds to these concerns, showing that when citizenship education is delivered as a discrete subject by dedicated teachers at GCSE level, students are more likely to vote and report positive civic outcomes (Kerr et al., 2010). Yet, even in the scenario gaps remain - teaching quality, resources, and school priorities all influenced the programme's uneven effectiveness.

The benefits of strong classroom practices are clear. Torney-Purta (2002) found that open classroom climates, where students discuss political issues freely, lead to higher civic engagement and voting rates. Similarly, Eichhorn et al. (2014) revealed that 16- and 17-year-olds in Scotland, supported by robust political education, had turnout rates comparable to older voters. Eichhorn and Hubner (2023) further emphasized how such discussions positively shape young people's attitudes and electoral readiness. Despite these promising results, the removal of structured citizenship education in England leaves critical questions about its ability to adequately prepare students for electoral participation. Therefore, these shifts underscore the growing importance of how we define political literacy in today's information environment.

The concept of political literacy - often cited as a central goal of citizenship education - has been defined as "learning about and how to make oneself effective in public life through knowledge, skills, and value", Crick (1998). It encompasses the knowledge and understanding of political processes and issues that enable individuals to perform their roles as citizens effectively, Denver and Hands (1990). This concept is tied to several theoretical frameworks in social policy. For example, Cassel and Lo (1997) identified cognitive mobilisation as a key theory, suggesting that education and political involvement empower individuals to use their mental abilities effectively in political contexts. Their work also highlights the role of structural factors, such as societal roles, in shaping political behaviour, and the importance of socialisation agents like families and schools in transmitting political values to young people. These frameworks underscore the foundational role of education in fostering political engagement. This therefore forms the foundation of discussions around the preparedness of young people for democratic participation and is thus particularly relevant as the UK government considers lowering the voting age to 16.

The UK government's proposal to lower the voting age to 16 has reignited debates about the political literacy of young people aged 16-18. Advocates of this policy highlight the inconsistency in rights, noting that 16-year-olds can marry, pay taxes, and join the military but are excluded from voting. Proponents argue that lowering the voting age in Scotland and Wales has already demonstrated success, with turnout rates for 16- and 17-year-olds being comparable to the general electorate and often higher than those of 18- to 20-year-olds (Eichhorn et al., 2014). Additionally, lowering the voting age could also incentivise political parties to engage more with youth issues, as young people would represent a larger and more influential voting bloc. However, critics highlight that these benefits depend on whether young people are equipped with the political literacy needed to participate responsibly in elections.

Compounding this issue is the rise of social media as a dominant source of political information for young people (Banaji & Buckingham, 2013). While platforms provide new avenues for engagement, they also amplify misinformation and foster distrust in traditional democratic institutions. Dassonneville et al. (2012) argue that critical thinking and media literacy are essential for countering these risks. Without meaningful reforms, young people could remain vulnerable to manipulation, particularly as debates around lowering the voting age to 16 continue to gain momentum.

The Labour government's plans to extend the voting franchise are closely tied to political literacy, which is strongly linked with citizenship education. For votes at 16 to succeed, educational reforms may be required to ensure young voters are equipped to participate responsibly. This raises critical questions: would students engage more with citizenship education if their opportunity to vote was closer? Would improving citizenship education affect voter turnout among 16- to 18-year-olds, or has the rise of social media diminished the influence of formal political education?

These critical questions tie into a broader body of research on citizenship education and political engagement. Although there's a wealth of research on citizenship education and political engagement, important gaps remain. Studies like Kerr et al. (2010) and Eichhorn et al. (2014) have shown how structured citizenship education can improve political literacy and voter turnout, especially among younger age groups. However, much of this work relies on quantitative data, such as turnout statistics or policy evaluations, leaving out the voices of young people themselves. We know less about how students perceive the quality of their political education and whether they feel it prepared them for democratic participation. On top of this, the influence of social media - now a dominant source of news for young people - has added a new layer of complexity. Its potential to amplify misinformation raises questions about how well traditional citizenship education can compete in today's information landscape.

This study addresses these gaps by focusing on the reflections of 18- to 21-year-olds who have recently completed their formal education. By exploring their experiences, it offers a more personal, qualitative insight into how citizenship education shapes political literacy and engagement. These perspectives not only complement existing research but also provide valuable guidance for improving education and policy, especially as debates about votes at 16 continue.

This paper therefore aims to answer the following research question. "Bridging the Gap: 18- to 21-Year-Olds' Perspectives on Reforming Citizenship Education in England"

This paper is structured into four chapters. The research will be achieved using in - depth interviews of three participants. Chapter Two outlines the qualitative research approach used for this study, detailing the sampling strategy, its rationale, limitations and ethical considerations. Chapter Three presents and interprets the results from the interviews, Chapter Four then concludes the paper by summarising the findings and discussing their implications for future policy and electoral reforms.

2. Data and Methods

2.1 - The Participants

Participants were selected via purposive (judgement) sampling, a non-probability technique where the researcher deliberately chooses individuals who can provide rich, relevant data for the research question (Patton, 2015). The aim was to assemble a small but diverse sample of 18–21-year-olds in England who had just completed their secondary citizenship education and exhibited varying levels of political engagement. This approach was appropriate for this qualitative study because the goal was to ensure diversity in key attributes (gender and level of political engagement) rather than to generalise to a larger population. By using researcher judgment to target a specific subset of individuals, purposive sampling allowed the inclusion of participants who could provide varied perspectives on citizenship education. Selection criteria stipulated representation of both genders and a spread from low to high political engagement.

Following initial social-media recruitment, volunteers were screened by age, gender, and self-reported engagement in politics. Three respondents met the criteria and agreed to participate. Pseudonyms are used throughout to protect confidentiality.

Code Name	Age	Location	Level of Political Engagement
Piper	20	Greater Manchester	Medium

Isack	21	London	High
Alyssa	20	Sussex	Low

Table 1: Participant characteristics

This was a small sample size, but interviewing exactly three participants was stipulated by the SP201 course constraints. Therefore, rather than seeking generalisability, the focus was instead on gathering rich narratives from a range of perspectives (Bryman, 2016).

2.2 - Study Procedures

All participants were recruited via social media advertising (Instagram and X), which allowed access to a geographically dispersed pool of 18–21-year-olds in England who had recently completed their secondary citizenship education (Bryman, 2016). Responses were screened to ensure a balanced mix of gender and self-reported political engagement (low, medium, high). Once selected, each volunteer received an information sheet and consent form by e-mail, outlining the study's aims, the topics to be covered (schooling experiences in citizenship education, perceived gaps, and suggestions for improvement), and their rights as research participants. Written informed consent was obtained before any data collection commenced.

A non-random judgement sampling approach was applied: the researcher used knowledge of each respondent's gender and engagement level to assemble a small but diverse sample (Piper: female, medium engagement; Isack: male, high engagement; Alyssa: female, low engagement). This purposive strategy ensured that the study captured a range of perspectives rather than statistical representativeness (Patton, 2015).

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, chosen for their flexibility in probing complex personal perceptions while maintaining comparability across cases (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Two interviews were conducted online via Zoom and one in person at a neutral, quiet venue. Each session lasted 30–50 minutes, was audio-recorded with explicit permission, and subsequently transcribed verbatim.

Interviews were semi-structured and lasted between 30–50 minutes. I began with broad, exploratory questions (e.g., "What do you remember about citizenship education at school?"), before narrowing to more focused prompts about political literacy, voting age, and access to information. While the guide covered key areas—school experiences, understanding of government and rights, views on votes at 16, and sources of political information – I adapted follow-up questions based on each participant's responses. For example, if someone mentioned feeling unprepared to vote, I probed deeper: "Can you say more about what you wish you'd learned?" This approach allowed space for both shared themes and individual differences to emerge organically.

2.3 - Data Analysis

I used a thematic approach to analyse my data informed by sensitising concepts (Blumer, 1954), rather than approaching it from a full inductive, grounded theory position. The sensitising concepts were drawn from relevant literature and included political literacy, civic preparedness, and political socialisation (Crick, 1998; Cassel & Lo, 1997; Eichhorn et al., 2014), which shaped both the interview guide and the identification of core themes

My interview guide was structured around key areas of interest - including experiences of citizenship education, perceived gaps, political engagement, and views on voting age - and these areas naturally guided the identification of themes during analysis. After transcribing each interview verbatim, I read and re-read the transcripts closely, highlighting recurring ideas and patterns across cases. These formed the basis of an initial thematic map, which I then refined by grouping similar insights together and ensuring that each theme responded clearly to the research question.

While I did not formally generate open codes in a line-by-line process, I remained attentive to the language participants used and used "memoing" to track developing interpretations. The final themes were thus the product of both prior conceptual framing and close engagement with the data. Throughout,

I aimed to preserve the distinctiveness of each participant's perspective while identifying areas of convergence and contrast across the dataset.

2.4 - Ethical Considerations

All participants were over the age of 18 and provided informed consent prior to the interviews. I clearly communicated the aims and scope of the research, emphasising that participation was voluntary, that they had the right to withdraw at any time, and that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential. The conversations were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed shortly after; recordings were deleted once transcription was complete. Identifiable information was removed during the analysis process, and pseudonyms were used in all reporting. As the topic posed minimal risk and focused on reflections about school-based education, no distress was anticipated. However, participants were reminded that they could skip any questions they did not wish to answer. These steps ensured ethical integrity while allowing participants to speak openly about their experiences.

2.5 – Reflexivity

Throughout the research process, I practiced reflexivity, informed by my own support for votes at 16 and active political background. To mitigate potential bias, I conducted flexible interviews that allowed participants' views to shape the direction of questioning. I also engaged in memo-writing during and after interviews to track emerging themes and reflect on my own assumptions. While I did not use formal coding, my analysis was guided by sensitising concepts drawn from the literature, particularly Crick's emphasis on political literacy (1998), Cassel and Lo's (1997) work on socialisation agents, and Eichhorn et al.'s (2014) focus on educational preparedness. These concepts shaped both the framing of follow-up questions and my interpretation of participant responses. This iterative approach aligns with the interpretivist logic of qualitative research, where meaning is constructed jointly between researcher and participant, and where reflexivity is essential to maintaining analytical integrity.

3. Results

The following section presents the key themes that emerged from the interviews. Several shared patterns stood out; concerning the inadequacy of formal citizenship education, reliance on external information sources, and ambivalence around voter readiness at 16. The structure below follows the logic of the research questions and explores both expected themes and surprising observations.

3.1 - Curricular Gaps in Citizenship

All three participants felt their school-based citizenship education was very limited. Piper described her school's provision as minimal: "we had a week of citizenship each year" tucked into other classes. These brief lessons covered basic civic topics (how government and voting work) but lacked depth and never included real-world updates, making them easy for her to dismiss as "boring". Isack's experience was similar – in his school, citizenship was part of PSHE but "just very surface level." He said it stayed abstract and omitted practical knowledge, with hardly any discussion of current events to spark interest. Alyssa stated that the only citizenship education she received was a "twenty-minute power point in tutor time" and that at the time she felt as though she knew more about the politics of Weimar Germany in the 1930s (as part of the History GCSE curriculum) than "how it worked in the UK government!."

All three believed that the curriculum needed a significant overhaul. Piper argued that citizenship should be a standalone subject taught by specialists. She also felt it should stay discussion-based instead of an exam-focused stand-alone GCSE subject. Isack likewise thought a more interactive, real-life approach to citizenship (such as discussing local politics and news stories) would have made him and his peers pay more attention. Alyssa stated that for her A Level Economics course "understanding the impact of political and economic decision making" was essential - therefore suggesting the academic benefits of teaching this core breadth of knowledge at an earlier age.

Henceforth, these perceptions echo broader critiques in the literature that UK citizenship education remains under-resourced and decontextualised (Jerome & Kisby, 2012). That students remembered learning more about historical fascism than UK governance illustrates the continuing tension between academic and civic aims in school curricula (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). This disconnect reflects Westheimer and Kahne's critique of civics education models that prioritise passive, rule-following

behaviours over democratic participation. Their typology of citizen-building - “personally responsible,” “participatory,” and “justice-oriented” citizens - helps explain why participants described their lessons as detached from real political life. Rather than encouraging political agency or critical thought, the lessons they recalled emphasised generic values or outdated historical events, leaving students disengaged. The invisibility of real-world civic structures within the curriculum thus risks producing citizens who are formally enfranchised but lack the tools to act meaningfully in democratic spaces.

3.2 - Information Channels

Because formal schooling gave them little real-world context, all the participants turned to outside information sources. Piper’s civic awareness came largely from home: her father followed the news and discussed major events, whereas many of her classmates “never had the news on” at home and stayed unaware of important issues. Isack, by contrast, learned about politics mostly via the internet. *“YouTube and Instagram... definitely told me more about politics than school did,”* he admitted. Alyssa kept up with the news specifically in order to help her with A Level economics; but social media had a low impact as she rarely used it.

Piper noted that social media platforms - especially TikTok - had *“introduced so many more people to politics”* by making information accessible and engaging for teens. On the other hand, she warned that relying *“too much”* on social media for news *“can be dangerous”* due to misinformation. Isack was even more critical of the online environment. He observed that political content online *“has to be loud... and shouty”* to grab attention, so extreme narratives often spread faster than facts - and he saw some classmates get drawn in. Neither school nor home, however, had equipped them to critically evaluate what they encountered online. *“I don’t think I was really shown the basics of seeing what is real and what’s not,”* Isack said, reflecting on this gap in his education.

Both Piper and Isack felt schools should step up to teach students how to navigate today’s media landscape. Piper even suggested using part of tutor time for a weekly news briefing to keep everyone informed. Integrating current affairs and media literacy into the curriculum, they agreed, would help young people evaluate the flood of online information instead of leaving them to fend for themselves.

These findings support prior claims that informal and digital channels have overtaken formal schooling as young people’s main source of civic information (Banaji & Buckingham, 2013). However, the participants’ concerns about online misinformation highlight an urgent need for schools to cultivate media literacy as a core component of democratic readiness. Kisby (2012) argues that civic education must evolve to reflect the participatory and digital dimensions of modern youth engagement. Their work highlights that while young people are politically interested, traditional forms of citizenship education often fail to reflect the interactive ways in which they engage with the world. The participants’ reflections reinforce this gap: their political learning happened on social media or in conversation with family - not in classrooms. This signals a mismatch between the platforms where political identity is shaped and the school curricula designed to foster political literacy.

3.3 - Voter Readiness & Votes at 16

When discussing the proposal to lower the voting age, all the participants supported allowing 16-year-olds to vote - but only with better preparation in schools. Piper noted that at 16 she and her peers were *“not informed to vote at all.”* In her view, *“if the voting age was to be lowered, there has to be a reform of citizenship education in schools,”* meaning schools would need to teach much more about elections and government so that younger teens could vote responsibly. She still favoured “votes at 16” in principle, pointing out that many 18-year-olds aren’t well-informed either. Moreover, she suggested that giving teens the vote while they are still in school could boost engagement - for example, teachers could guide first-time voters and make voting a normalised, collective activity in Year 11, helping to ingrain the habit early.

Isack likewise felt that enfranchising 16- and 17-year-olds could ignite greater political interest. One reason many teenagers are disengaged in politics, he suggested, was that they had no real say - *“they have no agency,”* so politics seemed irrelevant to them. *“If we were given the right to vote, we would have taken it more seriously,”* he said of his own peer group, implying that the responsibility would have made them pay more attention and learn more.

Alyssa stated that *“the opinion of young people is extremely valuable ... more than ever they seem to be up to date with political events and the world around them.”* She would have felt confident voting at 16, but cautioned the fact that *“younger people are much more susceptible to social media propaganda.”*

Henceforth, participants support votes at 16 in principle but emphasise that without enhanced political education in schools, early enfranchisement risks reinforcing existing inequalities in political knowledge and increasing exposure to misinformation. Crick's (1998) foundational argument, for instance, that political literacy is a “prerequisite for effective democratic participation” strongly resonates with participants' emphasis on the need for reform before expanding the franchise. For example, Piper and Isack both argued that without school-based preparation, lowering the voting age could leave young people politically under-equipped, undermining the democratic intent behind the proposal. These concerns also echo Eichhorn and Bergh's (2022) findings that effective political socialisation at school is critical for ensuring early enfranchisement results in meaningful engagement.

3.4 - Unexpected / Interesting Observations

Several unexpected insights emerged during the interviews that, while not forming a formal theme, revealed overlooked aspects of how young people perceive political learning.

One surprise was the contrasting gender dynamics in political engagement. Piper described young women as more politically responsive, especially after events like the overturn of *Roe v. Wade*. By contrast, Isack recalled a male-dominated space where political discussion was led mostly by boys, hinting at how school culture shapes who feels confident to speak. Another unexpected finding was the confusion around the term “citizenship education” itself. Alyssa asked, *“What actually is citizenship education?”* and admitted she didn't recall being taught it. This echoed a broader invisibility of the subject - even among high-achieving students, there was little recognition that it had been taught at all. Piper also described how schools failed to explain national events like the Manchester Arena bombing. *“We had an assembly... but they never talked about why it happened.”* Rather than prompting discussion, these moments were treated as detached incidents. Finally, Isack highlighted a lack of basic economic understanding among young people, suggesting that citizenship education rarely touches on how economic policy affects everyday life.

These reflections suggest that citizenship education is not only lacking in structure and visibility but also missing opportunities to respond to students' ever changing and uncertain realities. Perhaps most unexpectedly, some young people do not even realise that it exists at all.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

4.1 - Discussion of Findings

This study builds on existing research into young people's political literacy and the delivery of citizenship education in England, particularly critiques of the post-2014 curriculum shift that deprioritised structured civic learning (Kisby, 2012; Andrews et al., 2019). While previous studies have shown that students often leave school underprepared for democratic participation, this study adds depth by exploring how 18- to 21-year-olds retrospectively understand and explain that lack of preparedness in their own words.

This study finds that the most striking limitation of citizenship education is its invisibility - many participants could not recall receiving it at all. When it was delivered, it was vague, tokenistic, and divorced from real-life relevance. For example, learning about “British values” through a single PowerPoint or discussing politics only through distant historical case studies left students unaware of basic political structures or rights. Participants also expressed a lack of confidence in their ability to vote meaningfully at 18, let alone 16, due to the absence of curriculum content that made civic knowledge feel relevant or accessible.

The study further identifies a double burden: citizenship education was not only weakly delivered but also left young people unprepared to navigate the political information they encountered elsewhere - particularly on social media. Although social media platforms made news more accessible, participants described feeling ill-equipped to distinguish facts from propaganda. They argued that schools should take a more active role in fostering media literacy and building long-term civic awareness.

In line with findings from earlier studies, the subject's low status and unclear delivery continue to undermine its potential. However, this study extends prior research by highlighting how deeply this invisibility is felt - even among politically interested university students. Participants' reflections reveal that citizenship education was so fragmented and underdeveloped that it failed not only to teach core democratic knowledge, but even to register in students' memory as a distinct subject.

Overall, while individual experiences varied, participants consistently described citizenship education as insufficiently visible, practical, and engaging. This lack of structure, paired with increasing exposure to online misinformation, jointly reinforces a cycle of disempowerment - leaving young people formally enfranchised, but informally unequipped.

4.2 - Implications for Citizenship Education

With Votes at 16 potentially imminent in England and across the UK for general elections; this study's findings carry significant policy implications. By examining the lived experiences of 18- to 21-year-olds reflecting on their secondary education, this study reveals not only where citizenship provision is falling short but also how it might be reimagined to ensure more equitable political literacy for all young people.

Participants consistently described their citizenship education as fragmented, forgettable, or altogether absent. None recalled learning how Parliament works, what different political parties stand for, or how to register and vote. This lack of foundational knowledge has direct implications for enfranchisement. If 16- and 17-year-olds are given the vote without structural reform in how schools prepare students for political participation, the danger is not simply apathy - it is misdirection. Participants expressed concern that, in the absence of formal guidance, many peers form their political views through unregulated online spaces, often shaped by outrage, misinformation, or simplistic narratives. Voting without critical capacity risks deepening democratic vulnerability, especially for younger voters.

This extends existing research on political literacy by showing how even relatively engaged university students can feel unequipped to vote confidently. It also highlights a key blind spot in current debates around youth enfranchisement: expanding rights without expanding education leaves young people exposed to influence rather than empowered to participate. The findings reveal a striking contradiction: while young people are often framed as politically apathetic, participants described themselves and their peers as deeply interested - but lacking tools, context, or confidence.

Taken together, this study makes a case for treating schools not just as information providers but as gateways to political agency. If votes at 16 are to be implemented in a meaningful way, citizenship education must be positioned as a core civic entitlement, not an afterthought. The challenge is not only to improve what students know, but to reshape how and where they learn to think critically, engage civically, and make informed choices in a noisy and polarised political landscape.

4.3 - Limitations

This study has several limitations which constrain the scope and generalisability of its findings. Firstly, all three participants were aged between 18 and 21 and currently enrolled in university, meaning that their experiences are likely shaped by their higher levels of educational attainment and exposure to political discussion at university. While their reflections provide valuable insight into how school-based citizenship education is remembered and evaluated later in life, the findings may not capture the perspectives of those who have followed non-university pathways, such as apprenticeships.

Secondly, the retrospective nature of the data poses challenges around recall bias. Participants were not interviewed during or immediately after their experience of secondary school citizenship lessons, but instead asked to reflect back on them from a distance of several years. As a result, the study relies on reconstructed memories rather than contemporaneous accounts, which may limit the reliability and specificity of certain details - particularly when participants themselves admitted to forgetting how the subject was delivered.

Thirdly, the study is limited in scope by its small sample size. With only three participants, the findings cannot be generalised to the broader population of young people in England. Moreover, the sample lacked diversity in terms of schooling types, regions, and post-16 pathways. While the interviews offer

rich qualitative depth, they do not provide a comprehensive overview of how citizenship education is experienced across the country.

In addition, this research focuses solely on student perspectives and does not include the voices of other relevant stakeholders such as teachers, policymakers, or curriculum developers. As a result, the study captures only one side of the policy-practice gap. The absence of direct classroom observation or analysis of the current curriculum documents also means that conclusions about what is taught in citizenship education - and how - are based solely on students' recollections rather than triangulated with institutional evidence.

Future research could address these limitations by engaging a broader and more diverse sample, including non-university leavers, and by incorporating interviews with teachers or classroom observation. Doing so would enable a more rounded picture of what citizenship education currently looks like - and how it might be improved in practice to support proposals such as votes at 16.

4.4 - Positionality

As an incredibly politically engaged university student who supports votes at 16 and has lobbied for this policy within my political party - the UK Labour Party, I approached this study with strong normative beliefs about youth enfranchisement. I was politicised from a young age and grew up in a politically active household, which has shaped my assumptions about what constitutes good political education. I was mindful that these experiences differ significantly from those of some participants and sought to mitigate potential bias by adopting a flexible interview format that allowed participants to articulate their own socialisation trajectories. By foregrounding their perspectives and using follow-up prompts based on their language and priorities, I aimed to remain responsive to views that diverged from my own.

4.5 - Conclusion

This study set out to explore how young people reflect on the adequacy of their citizenship education, grounded in the context of Votes at 16 now being the official policy of the UK Government. The findings reveal a consistent picture of curricular invisibility, limited preparation for democratic participation, and an urgent need for reform.

Two key implications emerge. First, the return of structured political education at GCSE level, delivered by trained staff, could address the inconsistencies described. Second, as young people increasingly turn to social media for political information, media literacy should form a core part of citizenship education (Dassonneville et al., 2012).

While small in scale, this research contributes new insight into how politically interested young people make sense of their civic education - and where they believe it falls short. If the goal is to build a more informed, confident electorate, then schools must be empowered to deliver citizenship education that is visible, practical, and future facing.

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Appendix 1 – Ethics Review Form**Screen A (About the study)**

A1. Title of research project /study

Bridging the Gap: 18- to 21-Year-Olds' Perspectives on Reforming Citizenship Education in England

A2. Is this study funded?

No.

A3. Abstract

Your abstract should outline in non-technical language the purpose of the research (Approx. 150-200 words)

This research explores how 18- to 21-year-olds in England feel about the gaps in their citizenship education and how addressing these could improve voter turnout and political literacy, particularly with the Labour governments plans to lower the voting age to 16. While citizenship education has been seen as crucial for preparing young people for democratic participation, its impact has been inconsistent. Curriculum changes, differences in teaching quality, and the growing influence of social media have all created challenges for fostering political literacy among young people.

Through three semi structured in-depth interviews with young adults who recently left secondary education, this study aims to understand how they reflect on their political education - what worked, what didn't, and how it shaped their readiness to vote. It also looks at whether reforms to citizenship education could help tackle modern challenges like misinformation and disengagement. By focusing on young people's voices, this research adds to the debate about how political education can be improved and what role it might play in supporting votes at 16. The findings aim to inform future reforms in both education and electoral policies.

A4. Data Collection

Briefly describe the data collection method(s) to be used (Approx. 100-150 words)

Data will be collected in England using semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted via Zoom or in person, depending on participant preference. This qualitative approach is well-suited to exploring participants' nuanced reflections on citizenship education and political literacy, allowing for comparability across cases while retaining flexibility to follow up on relevant insights.

Three participants aged 18 to 21, who recently completed secondary education in England, will be selected using purposive sampling. Recruitment will take place via social media platforms (e.g. Instagram and X), targeting a diverse pool of young adults across different regions. Volunteers will be screened by age, gender, and self-reported political engagement to ensure variation in perspectives.

Informed consent will be obtained in writing before interviews begin. All interviews will be audio-recorded with permission and securely stored before being transcribed for analysis.

A5. In what country or countries will data collection take place? Will you travel there, or will the research be conducted remotely/online?

United Kingdom (England), with the research being conducted online.

A6. Will your study be conducted in the LSE Behavioural Lab?

No

A7. When do you expect to begin data collection?

March 2025 – May 2025

A8. What is the approximate duration of your data collection?

Please allow sufficient time for the ethics review process. You cannot begin any data collection until ethics approval has been obtained.

Five weeks

Screen F (Type of ethics review) [C3]

F1. Does the research involve vulnerable participants?

Note that vulnerability may be due to a number of factors, for instance due to: age, potential marginalisation, disability, disadvantageous power relationships within personal or professional roles, etc. Young people under the age of 18 may also be potentially vulnerable.

No

F2. Does the study involve children aged 16 or under?

No

F3. Will the research involve asking participants to respond to questions that might involve the discussion of sensitive topics?

For example: where research intrudes into the private sphere or delves into some deeply personal experience; where the study is concerned with deviance or social control; where the study impinges on the vested interests of powerful persons or the exercise of coercion or domination; where the research deals with things that are sacred to those being studied that they do not wish profaned; or where discussion of the topic could place the participant (or researcher) at risk.

No

F4. Does the study involve any use of deception, and/or will participants not be fully informed at the start as to what the study is about?

Deception can occur at a variety of levels: for example, at one level, experimental methods may depend on participants being deliberately misled as to the true nature or purpose of the research in which they are taking part; at another, covert participant observation may entail an implicit deception as to the true identity and role of the researcher. Deception may be a legitimate and necessary feature of social scientific research, but its use must always be properly justified.

No

F5. Does the study entail the collection of any biometric data?

No

F6. For **primary** data collection, will you be collecting written consent from all participants?

*Written consent does not need to comprise a hard copy signature. Typed confirmation is acceptable. For **online surveys**, written consent could be via an explicit tick-box after the study information is presented at the start of the survey. For **secondary** data please select 'N/A'. However, the researcher should ensure, where relevant, that consent was given for the data to be used by third parties.*

Yes

F7. Is there any reason the research might present any risks to either yourself or your participants?

For instance, if the research is politically sensitive and might attract the attention of authorities

No

F8. Is there any reason why the research requires review/approval by the Research Ethics Committee (as opposed to Departmental review/approval)?

For example, i) if REC approval is required by the funder or to satisfy other external requirements; or ii) where a course convenor/class teacher is submitting this form to cover small/low risk projects that students will be conducting as part of a course/assignment. If you are unsure please contact research.ethics@lse.ac.uk.

No

Screen G (Ethics review questions I)

G1. What participants will be involved in your study? How will they be identified /recruited? Are there any inclusion / exclusion criteria? If yes, describe them.

I will recruit three young adults aged 18 to 21 who have completed their secondary education in England. Participants will be recruited through purposive sampling via social media (Instagram and X), using targeted posts to identify individuals who meet the inclusion criteria. Inclusion is based on age, educational background (having attended secondary school in England), and variation in self-reported political engagement.

G2. If you need to recruit participants via a gatekeeper*, please give details. (Might this raise issues of whether participants' involvement is truly voluntary? Might the gatekeeper influence potential participants in some other way?)

**A gatekeeper could be anyone who the researcher needs to go through in order to gain access to participants.*

N/A

G3. Will any incentives be offered to participants for taking part in the research? If so please give details. (Might this unduly influence their decision as to whether or not to take part?)

No.

G4. Are there any payments or other incentives to the researcher(s) that might be perceived as having an impact on the objectivity of the research?

No.

G5. Outline how participants will be given information about the study and what their involvement will be, and how you will record consent. If you will not be obtaining informed consent you must explain why.

Please see the [guidance on informed consent](#), which includes a sample template. (N.B. You will be asked to attach a copy of your planned participant information sheet and consent form at the end of this form.)

Participants will receive an email, or message, with a detailed information sheet outlining the project's aims, what participation entails, and their rights as participants. Written consent will be obtained through a signed or typed consent form prior to the interview.

G6. Will participants be fully anonymized in your research outputs (dissertation, thesis, publications)? If not, please provide a rationale as to why.

Yes.

G7. Describe any other potential risks that your project might pose to participants, and what safeguards will you put in place to address or mitigate these.

Note that harm could be physical, emotional, psychological or reputational.

If your study will involve children/participants under the age of 16, question H1 (next screen) will address this.

It is highly unlikely that the research will present any risks to the participants.

G8. Describe how you intend to handle issues of confidentiality and anonymity, both in your collection of data and in your study outputs.

We strongly recommend that all researchers complete a Data Management Plan. A link will be provided once you have submitted this form.

The interviews will be recorded using the Zoom audio record function, or voice memos if the interview is conducted in person, to ensure all information is collected. I will then transcribe the recording using AI and lock them and the transcriptions into a password protected file. Only the participants and myself will know who participated in the study.

G9. Describe any potential risks that your project might pose to you as the researcher or any other researchers involved in study. How will you mitigate these?

Note that risks could be emotional, psychological, reputational, physical.

It is highly unlikely that the research presents any risks to myself.

G10. Will the study provide any benefits to participants or third parties?

While there are no direct personal benefits, participants may find value in reflecting on their education experiences. The findings may contribute to improved citizenship education policy in the future.

G11. Might the *dissemination* of the study results adversely affect (directly or indirectly) any individuals or groups? If so, are there ways you can mitigate this?

No.

G12. If you will be working with (or employing) other researchers: describe the principles of good practice that you will follow, addressing issues such as ownership of data and co-authorship. How will you ensure that any local research assistants you hire will receive a fair and appropriate return for their work? How will you maintain the integrity and good reputation of the discipline?

If not relevant, please enter N/A.

N/A

G13. If you plan to use any crowd-sourcing platforms (such as MTurk, Prolific Academic) to collect data, please give details here.

Note that researchers should treat participants on crowd-sourcing platforms fairly. Thus, researchers should ensure that they set fair rates of pay; enable easy ways of communication between participants and researcher, etc.). If you have never used these platforms before please seek training before doing so.

If not relevant, please enter N/A.

N/A

Screen H (Ethics review questions II) [Skip if you answered 'No' to all questions in screen F]

H1. Will your research involve children / young people aged 16 or under?

Please refer to the British Psychological Society's Code of Human Research Ethics

No

H2. If the study involves discussion of sensitive topics*, please give details and how you intend to handle this.

No.

**For example - but not limited to - sexual activity, illegal behaviour or social control, experience of violence or abuse, drug use, a topic/issue considered sacred or taboo to the participants, etc.*

Please ensure you upload a copy of your interview question guide and/or survey questions at the end of the form

H3. Is there a potential risk that participants might disclose information indicating that they or someone else is at risk of significant harm? If so, how would you deal with this?

N/A

H4. If you plan to collect verbal, rather than written consent, please indicate why this is? Please also indicate how you will record their consent (e.g. by audio recording, or by a witness)

N/A

H5. If the research involves the use of deception in any way, please give details and explain how you will de-brief participants at the end of the study.

Please refer to the British Psychological Society's Code of Human Research Ethics

N/A

Screen J (Previous experience and covering comments)

J1. Outline any previous experience and/or ethics training that you have that is relevant to this study

If you will be conducting interviews on a sensitive topic, it would be helpful to know if you have any previous interview experience.

I have undergone the ethics training conducted during the SP201 class.

J2. If there are any covering comments you would like to flag to the reviewer, please add them here.

(Otherwise just add 'N/A')

Your covering comments will appear at the top of your review form when received by your supervisor or the Research Ethics Committee for review.

N/A

[C1] These questions, skipped here, are screening questions to determine if your research requires ethics review. If your research doesn't involve human subjects, e.g., uses publicly available survey data, you don't need to do the ethics review.

[C2] These questions screen if your project requires external ethics review. e.g., if you interview NHS staff and patients, staff working in prison, etc.

[C3] This section contains screening questions to help determine if your project involves low risks. For SP201, your project should involve low risk only. For your dissertation, high risk project will go through LSE school level ethics review, whereas low risk project will be reviewed by your advisor.

Appendix 2 - Interview Guide**Research Question: Bridging the Gap: 18- to 21-Year-Olds' Perspectives on Reforming Citizenship Education in England****1. Warm-Up Questions (5 minutes)**

Q1) “Can you tell me a little about yourself? For example, what are you doing now (e.g., studying, working)?”

Q2) “When did you finish secondary school, and what do you remember most about your time there?”

2. Experiences with Citizenship Education (10-15 minutes)

“Can you walk me through your experience with citizenship education in school? What kinds of topics or activities do you remember?”

Probes:

- Did you have lessons focused on politics, voting, or government. Was it embedded in PSHE lessons or Tutor time?
- Were current events or political discussions part of your classroom experience?

“How did you feel about those lessons at the time? Did they seem relevant or helpful to you?”

Probes:

- Did it help you understand the political / economic climate?
- Were there any lessons or topics that stood out to you as particularly useful or not useful?

“What, if anything, did you learn about voting, elections, or how the government works during school?”

Probes:

- Was this enough to make you feel informed about these topics when you finished school?
- How confident did you feel about participating in these processes after leaving school?

3. Political Literacy and Engagement (10-15 minutes)

“After leaving school, how would you describe your understanding of how voting and elections work?”

Probes:

- What contributed most to your understanding (e.g., school lessons, family discussions, social media)?
- Were there any gaps in your knowledge?

Probes:

- What helped or hindered that confidence?
- Did anything from school prepare you for making informed voting decisions?

4. Gaps in Citizenship Education (10-15 minutes)

“Thinking back, were there any areas that you felt were missing or not covered enough in your citizenship education?”

- *For example, learning about political parties, debating current issues, or understanding how decisions affect your daily life.*

5. Votes at 16 (Opinions) (5-10 minutes)

- *Goal: Gather views on lowering the voting age and its implications for citizenship education.*

How do you feel about the idea of lowering the voting age to 16?"

- Probes:
 - *Do you think most 16-year-olds would feel ready to vote? Why or why not?*
 - *What challenges might arise if the voting age were lowered?*

"How do you think citizenship education would need to change if 16-year-olds were allowed to vote?"

- Probes:
 - *Do you think this would motivate students to take these lessons more seriously?*
 - *What kinds of lessons or activities would be most important?*

6. Social Media and Political Information (Sensitive Topics) (5-10 minutes)

Q1) "How do you think social media influences how young people learn about politics?"

Probes:

- *What role does it play compared to school-based education?*
- *Do you think it helps or hinders young people in making informed decisions?*

Q2) "After leaving school, how prepared did you feel to navigate misinformation or biased news on social media?"

Probes:

- *Did your school address these issues? If so, how?*
- *What would have made you feel more confident in dealing with misinformation?*
- *Artificial Intelligence*

7. Demographic In Depth (5 minutes)

Did going to school in London influence your perception of accessibility to politics and government?

Did you perceive a gender divide in political engagement?

Did you notice a class-based divide in political engagement?

Did you observe an ethnic minority divide in political engagement?

8. Closing Questions (5 minutes)

- 1. Is there anything we haven't covered that you think is important about your experiences with citizenship education?"***

Q2) "If you could suggest one change to improve citizenship education for future students, what would it be and why?"

"Thank you so much for sharing your experiences and thoughts. Your input is really valuable to this research."

Appendix 3 – Anonymised Interview Script

RESEARCHER : Hi. This is my research project on citizenship education in England. My question is how do you 18 to 21 year olds in England perceived gaps in citizenship education and how do they believe it can be improved? Okay. So I'm going to tell my participant a bit about themselves and get them to tell themselves a bit about themselves first. And then we're going to go through some experiences with education in secondary school, sort of PSA cheats and some chip stuff, look at sort of political literacy and engagement sort of nowadays and sort of look at sort of the idea behind vote 16 and whether that will improve things and whether we think the 16 to 18 year olds are ready and prepared to vote. And then we're going to look at sort of demographically sort of some of the stuff in London, which is where my participant is from. And then we're going to go over some closing questions. Okay. So question one, can you tell me a little about yourself? For example, what are you doing now? Where about sort of are you in life? I guess.

ISACK : Yeah. So, so I'm currently a student. I'm in my final year of university at Warwick and I'm currently life wise. I'm in sort of a very awkward as a spot because I'm applying for masters, grad jobs. I just want something after uni. So, so a lot of big decisions currently and I'm currently working on my dissertation. So yeah. Amazing.

RESEARCHER : And when did you finish secondary school and what do you remember the most about your time there?

ISACK : I finished secondary school 2020. And what I remember most that is, well, what do I remember the most history lessons, mostly being messing about in the library a lot, a lot of the time. Yeah, just mainly that.

RESEARCHER : Amazing. So can you walk me through your experience with citizenship, education in school, you know, what kind of topics or activities to remember? Was it sort of embedded in sort of PSHE lessons or tutor time? That sort of thing. Yes.

ISACK : So in terms of PSHE, we at primary school, we definitely learn a big sort of we had PSHE lessons in primary school. They weren't much about citizenship. What it was for us, they called it PSHE, but it was more so RE, I thought. We had a different teacher for it and everything, but most of the time you just learn about religions, which is definitely a big part of PSHE in getting to know of religions and getting to live cohesively with them. But I don't think that was the full picture of it. But when I got to high school, PSHE, we had a bit more time on it, you know, another specialized teacher for it. But like, it was just, I wouldn't say it taught us about citizenship, I think it was just life in general. You know, one time we would learn about, you know, what are elections, and then next it will be like sexual health education. So it was less so citizenship and more just like how to live life in general.

RESEARCHER : Very cool. Did you have any sort of lessons, sort of focus on sort of the news or like politics or government? Was that ever, you know, taught in sort of a PSHE or lesson or a teacher time?

ISACK : So the one thing I remember the most distinctly was like, we learned about political parties in one lesson, and then we had to make our own sort of political party.

And what I remember just as a kid, I was a big sort of, oh, we need to tax the rich guy. And the assistant teacher didn't really like that. So we had a bit of a spat about it. But yeah, we learned about like the parties who the party leaders are. I remember that Jeremy Corbyn is very popular with the class back then. And yeah, we did learn about elections briefly. I don't remember it too much, but there was an element of politics in there.

RESEARCHER : Okay, amazing. And like, did you ever have sort of political discussions of sort of other members of your class? Was that ever sort of part of your classroom experience? We did, yeah.

ISACK : Now, they mainly started because I was just very passionate about politics. I don't think they would have started if I wasn't there. But we would always bring up like, it was a very simplistic view of the world, you know, we were just about sort of 12, 13 at the time. But yeah, some conversations would

spring up mainly because of me, but they weren't too thorough. I mean, like I said before, when we had that lesson on political parties, everyone was just like, Oh, Jeremy Corbyn, he's cool. And that was it.

RESEARCHER : And do you, so, yeah, so, yes, those political discussions sort of part of your classroom experience. And how did you feel about the lessons at the time? Did they seem helpful or relevant to you?

ISACK : I was just very happy about them a bit because again, I was just very interested about about politics. But I think a lot of the lessons, they were very surface level. I mean, you are just teaching it to young teens. But I think they were decently formatted for young minds.

RESEARCHER : Okay. And were there any sort of other political parties, were there any sort of lessons or topics that stood out to you as being particularly useful or like particularly not useful?

ISACK : The thing is, I don't really remember them. That's the problem with it. It's the information wasn't very memorable. You just get told a bunch of stuff. For example, with political parties, the only part of it, which I remember is like the activity we have to design a logo for our own political party and the name. And I just, and I don't remember anything from the actual taught lesson. So it wasn't very memorable. So I don't think the information was great.

RESEARCHER : Okay. So you said that the information wasn't that great and it wasn't super memorable. So therefore, how confident did you feel afterwards about participating in sort of democratic processes after you left secondary school?

ISACK : Well, again, as someone who's very interested in politics, I felt quite confident. But that was just because of my own knowledge. When I looked at people in my class afterwards, whenever they talked about politics or or got engaged in politics, I saw that they didn't really do it much. It was more so they just have an example nowadays, I see a lot of them just being like, oh, yeah, it's immigrants, we don't like them and all that. And just becoming huge, like few of them have become like Christian, Christian nationalists. It's quite bad. But seeing what is done to my peers, I wouldn't say they looked too politically informed.

RESEARCHER : Okay, that's interesting. And do you think that this sort of level of being politically informed sort of increased as you and your peers got older? Or do you think it sort of stayed the same for about like 12, 13?

ISACK : I don't know if. Wait, so what's the question again?

RESEARCHER : I'm just saying like, you said that a lot of your formative sort of lessons about sort of politics and citizenship and government sort of happened in your 12 and 13. When you got to about like 15, 16 was this sort of amount of level about the same? Or do you think that awareness sort of increased or decreased?

ISACK : I think, I think as you get older, your awareness increases, I think, but I think it's relatively stayed the same. And for example, I talked to my friends, but back in back in London, who went to school with me and when I asked them about, oh, yeah, who do you vote for in the general election? It was and then when I asked why it was a very sort of surface level understanding that maybe just just quickly flicked through the manifesto and asked them how they voted tactically. And then you just hear like quite a weird reason for it. So I think if anything, that their knowledge might have decreased after secondary school. So yeah. Yeah, okay.

RESEARCHER : And you mentioned that you yourself were very political from an early age. Do you know why you think that is? Do you know any sort of particular factors as to why yourself were more political compared to your peers?

ISACK : Yes. So first of all, was my father, he's a very sort of political person. And he told me a lot about history, politics, and all that. And also, because I went to a school, I went to a school which was in a very affluent area, but I was very working class. And I sort of realized early on with my economic conditions

were very different to my peers. And and and I just got very angry that they had a lot and I didn't. And that sort of drove me to sort of be more passionate about equality.

RESEARCHER : Okay, but that's really, really helpful. Thank you. So with political literacy and engagement. So after leaving school, how would you describe your understanding of how the political systems work? So I think to go back to when you were sort of about 16, you know, 16, 17, how do you feel like your understanding was of voting in elections? Do you think that it was sort of sound? Or do you think that you weren't too sure about some bits or some nuances?

ISACK : I was sort of 16, 17, when I was in sixth form. I did politics for a level. And and I think that we definitely got a much thorough understanding. Yeah, yeah, because we were we were studying politics as a so specialized for it. But yeah, I think doing that as an A level, definitely cleared up a lot of the more practical things about politics.

RESEARCHER : And what contributed most to your understanding? So was it more sort of like again, like A level politics, sort of family discussions, social media, just stuff online in the news, what sort of do you think contributed most?

ISACK : Yeah, I definitely did. I did a lot of my own reading. But when it comes to sort of the political process, how democracy works, what or what are the features of it? A level was definitely the the main source of that.

RESEARCHER : So, bearing in mind that you only do A levels after you turn 16. That means that basically what you're saying is there was a gap when you were 16, you were doing your GCSEs still, that you felt like you didn't have all the knowledge that you had available. Is that sort of correct or am I getting it wrong here?

ISACK : Somewhat. Yeah, but I mean, I'm in a very unique position as a young person who was very interested in politics back then. But yeah, I don't, I don't think so. But actually, funnily enough, the first time I went into a polling station was when I was about when I was 13, because because the teacher knew that I was very interested in politics and our school was a polling station, and I got to see it. And that was, and it was mainly, and when I first went to vote, I knew what to do because of when I went in that polling station. So I just think that if other people got that experience, then that would have definitely helped them a lot to know what, what, what voting is like. If that answered your question a bit.

RESEARCHER : Yeah, no, that definitely does. So thinking back to sort of your climate secondary school, so not State form, were there any areas that you feel like were missing or like not covered in your sort of citizenship, sort of education, like for instance, sort of debating sort of current issues, understanding how governmental decisions impact your daily life, you know, how, you know, the distinction between sort of central government and local government, that sort of thing.

ISACK : Yeah, yeah, yeah, none of that was was covered as or again, it was just a very surface level. So look at it, and it was more so focused on the national picture rather, rather than the local, because, for example, a lot of people would, would sort of blame, would blame the government for a local problem, even though, you know, council could fix that. But yeah, the problem with PSHE is that it did equate everything political to the national rather, rather than local.

RESEARCHER : Do you think there were any sort of specific local things? So you mentioned sort of growing up in around the sort of Croydon area. Do you think that there are any sort of like specific local things that would have been helpful to sort of been discussed or mentioned?

ISACK : Yes. So, so since we've got the Trams of course, and a lot of people commuted to school on those and like people, and people complained about them being late and not working, we had the crash in 2017 as well, which was a huge story. I think was 2017, might have been 18. But yeah, when that happened, a lot of the people at school were like, it's the government's fault, this, this and that, and there was speaking about the national government, but even though Croydon Trams are run by Croydon Council. So, so there was definitely a mistake there by PSHE not to show that there is a distinction between national and local government.

RESEARCHER : And do you think there are any sort of like other sort of like political sort of flashpoints? The like, for instance, in 2017, you had London Bridge sort of stabbings. And there was a lot of sort of terrorist attacks in that sort of 2017, 2015, 2017 sort of period. Do you think that when sort of a political sort of flashpoint sort of emerged, there should have been more of an open discussion? Do you think that would have been helpful to sort of clear out any sort of grimors or sort of false sort of premises, etc?

ISACK : So, so in terms of terrorist attacks, what happened was that we did we did have a lot of assemblies on on terrorism and Islamophobia. But what I do remember in year seven was that we we held a two minute silence for the terrorist attacks in Paris in 20th. And, and there was a lot of lot of discussion at school because because people said, oh, but in this bit, but like the war in Syria and Iraq, thousands of people died there. I already know why we're holding a science for them. So that was something. But in terms of actually another flashpoint, Grenfell, no one really, of course, yeah, Grenfell, yeah.

RESEARCHER : Yeah.

ISACK : So so when Grenfell happened, it was really big in there. And I remember I was I was extremely scared of it. It frightened me massively. However, it didn't really get it didn't really get talked about much as we to talk about it amongst ourselves as students. But but I think there should have been something said by by our teachers as well. And in lessons, because you know, a lot of us live in in blocks of flats. And that that was that was really terrifying for us.

RESEARCHER : Yeah. No, no, 100%. I can definitely see why they should have been more covered there than maybe sort of was. So sort of how do you feel? So what do you think about the idea of the government lowering the voting age to 16? And do you think that most 16 year olds will be ready to vote bearing in mind the sort of educational experiences that you had?

ISACK : So I used to be quite quite supportive of it, quite supportive of this. But like, when I see young people these days, I can't lie. If you look at who's campaigning for votes for 16, it's for people that are already very informed about politics. And seeing non political 16 and 17 year olds, I don't really see them as having all the information available to to make a decision that of their own. A lot of them just do it based off of social media, what's trendy, and all of that. Like, I think if if 16 year olds could have voted, I think Nico Omilana might have had quite a big shot at winning mayor of London. I just don't think that a 16 year olds take it seriously and be they just don't have all the all the information.

RESEARCHER : But couldn't you use the same argument to say that 18 year olds don't have all the information?

ISACK : You could, but I think there's a lot more maturity associated at 18. But I think the thing about 16 year olds is that if we have sort of PSHE lessons, which teach you the the absolute fundamentals of sort of how the economy works, how government impacts you, just like what the hierarchy in the in the UK is, I think then yeah, have have have voted 16. But I think with what I'm seeing right now, I don't know if I could trust them.

RESEARCHER : Okay, that's really interesting. That was literally going to be my next question was, how do you think citizenship education would need to change if 16 year olds were to vote? How do you like which bits do you think need to sort of be adapted in the hypothetical situations where 16 year olds were 100% going the chance to vote?

ISACK : So I think first of all, please, love of God, give them a fundamental understanding of of economics. I know it might sound complicated, but they give them the very basics of it because it will definitely go a long way. Because I think understanding of economics in the country right now, especially amongst young people is just almost non existent. And so that and then how government impacts you. And what the hierarchy in the in the UK is like there's local government, there is national MPs, they can do this, this and that. And then other people can do this. So I think, and also teaching them about sort of minority groups as well. And the politics surrounding them. Because like, I think that the problem is a lot of 16 and 17 year olds are getting their information from social media and getting quite malignant, getting

recommended quite malicious content. So I think teaching them that what's right and wrong should also be something.

RESEARCHER : Just sort of linking to this, we you ever taught what the British sort of values official list is. Was that something that was ever discussed in school for you?

ISACK : I think so. I think so. I think, you know, I only think we went over it in one on one tutor sessions in the morning. I think that's it. Could you name any of them? Okay, so rule of law, democracy, respect. Yeah, and then there's four, right? Yeah, there's another one. Okay, wait, wait, let me think of it. Let me think of it. Democracy, respect, tolerance.

RESEARCHER : No. Yeah, sort of. There's one near the other one is individual liberty. Individual liberty, yeah. But I mean, bear in mind that you are very politically engaged person to struggle to list them. So it shows that they're like, I feel like this is the sort of thing that should sort of be sort of thing that might need to be sort of drilled into people. Because if you drill that into people from like a young age, then they've always sort of got, they sort of, you sort of redefine like what being British or English in fact, sort of sort of is and maybe that sort of will inspire people to take their sort of civic duty a bit more seriously. Again, this is my other thought of question is, do you think that vote 16 will mean that you're set, mean that, you know, take, take, you go back in time to when you were 16, do you think that would have made you and your peers take politics and take the government a bit more seriously, bearing in mind that you sort of, you know, had the responsibility of voting? And do you think that back then you would sort of, you know, listen more and engage more sort of in the news and sort of all that sort of stuff, bearing in mind that, you know, these things, you know, you now have the responsibility to make a choice?

ISACK : I do think so. Yeah, I think when you look at a lot of people who are who are very disengaged in politics and don't really care that they do that because they have, because they have, because they have no agency that either can't vote or or or refuse to vote. So I think if I think if I was 16 and and with my peers, I think if we were given the right to vote, I think we would have taken it more more seriously.

I think once we're given that responsibility, we would have been a bit more curious about it and we would have actually sort of looked into it a bit more. But I just, yeah, basically.

RESEARCHER : Yeah, okay. So moving on to the section with social media and sort of where people are getting their political sort of information from. How do you think social media influences young people to learn about politics? And, you know, what role does it play compared to sort of the sort of learning that you sort of receive in school?

ISACK : So I think the problem with social media is the people who create content, they try to get views and the thing about a lot of political content is the Iranese to grab people's eyes. So it has to be, it has to be loud, it has to be shouty, it has to be obscene in some ways, it's that people look at it and someone like, oh, look, look what migrants did in it. And, you know, that's, that's much more sort of appealing to, to young voters than, oh, what's, what's important about the world of law. So, so a lot of the important things which are taught in school tend to be the more boring things that people don't care about, but the really malicious things that are quite sort of catchy, they're all, they're on social media.

RESEARCHER : And do you, with you yourself, do you think that you were more influenced by sort of social media and sort of online sort of content than maybe what you were taught at school?

ISACK : I was sort of, me myself, I was more so exposed to sort of external things like, like, like books and all that, but, but I would say that the, the, the sort of YouTube and Instagram and all that definitely told me more about politics than the PSHC.

RESEARCHER : So sort of linking back to what we sort of mentioned before about social media, sort of after leaving school, did you feel prepared to sort of navigate misinformation or bias news on social media?

ISACK : Not really, I'd say. I thought I did, I liked to think I was very good at pointing out fake news, but I think that I think that I don't think that I was really shown the sort of basics of, of seeing what is real and

what's not. I remember the, for example, my parents, you know, I had to tell them a lot of the time if something, if something online was fake or not about like sort of Donald Trump or something. So I had to work out a lot of it for myself instead.

RESEARCHER : And did you ever have sort of these sort of discussions about misinformation and sort of radicalisation and stuff, sort of free social media, sort of in your school? Do you think that, you know, you have those sort of assemblies or sort of tutor time discussions about them? Yeah, yeah, definitely.

ISACK : Yeah, we did. And, and I remember the last, there was this kids in my class, in, in, in most of my classes, who was clearly very inspired by sort of online far right things. And so it was, it was visible that that was happening to people.

And then in my, in my assemblies, we did talk about like, oh, yeah, you shouldn't hate people and all that. But there wasn't a focus on, on social media. There was, that there was more, more focus on staying safe on social media and sort of cyberbullying and all of that. So I wouldn't say that there was a focus on social media.

RESEARCHER : And recently we've seen a rise of sort of artificial intelligence tools that has completely changed the game in terms of sort of misinformation and online propaganda. Do you think that schools need to adapt a bit more to sort of the changing world bearing in mind, sort of, you know, how, you know, how artificial intelligence has completely changed this?

ISACK : Definitely, I think about them. I mean, I mean, even I got duped the other day by, by an AI audio of, of JD Vance, I actually had to go up and search the, if it was real, and it, and it wasn't, and it sounded pretty, pretty convincing. And if me at like, at my age, can get due by that, then, then I think people, people in secondary school can also would, would get, would be more susceptible to it.

RESEARCHER : And now I'm going to ask you some questions about sort of how sort of your demographic information may have influenced all of these things. So you mentioned going to, you went to school in Croydon, London. And do you think that being in London influenced your perception of sort of accessibility to politics and government?

And did you feel like being in London made you feel like politics was more sort of, you know, for you, rather than if you lived somewhere else in the country?

ISACK : Oh, yeah, yeah, no, it's just,

RESEARCHER : Do you want me to ask it? I'll ask it again. Okay.

ISACK : The last bit, bit about London.

RESEARCHER : So I said, did you go into school in London, influence your perception of accessibility and politics? Do you feel like because you're in London, you felt like politics sort of spoke more to you than if you lived sort of somewhere else in the country, let's say like Manchester or Newcastle?

ISACK : Yeah. So, so, so living in London, definitely the, the, you know, the, the house department was just like, which is like one, was one 20 minute train away was, was very good.

It did seem to make it more accessible. But even still being in London, like for example, Croydon, I, I lived in most southern part of Croydon. So you still feel somewhat detached, even though I still live in London, but like I did, I probably did feel closer to the political process than the most people in the country.

RESEARCHER : Okay. And did you perceive a gender divide in political engagement? Like, do you feel like that, you know, in your sort of, you know, sort of peer group around sort of 15, 16, did you feel like the male students are more engaged or the female students are more engaged?

ISACK : Definitely Yeah. I think whenever we did talk about politics at school, it was very much a male dominated thing. I don't, I only know two people that I really had like two girls that I had political conversations with the rest of them were all men and, and, and we were also sort of like very high and mighty about, about being, being informed. And also it depended on the, on the types of issues as well. For example, we had a big debate about sort of trans issues. And then there was one girl who was mainly defending it. But when, when we talked about sort of like, sort of about the economy and whatnot, it was a very male thing. And, and then, and that sort of persisted into secondary school somewhat and like even some seminars at, at, at university. Yeah. Like, like politics seminars, it's mainly men just talking and not women. So yeah.

RESEARCHER : And did you notice any sort of a class based divide in sort of political engagement in school? Past based, like, did you feel like more sort of middle class students were probably a bit more engaged because their parents sort of spoke about like the news to them?

ISACK : Yes. So, so, so I did go to a much more middle class to, to upper class school. So, and, and, and then it was me as being probably one of the very few working class people there. I was more interested in politics than most people. But like, when I look at my peers, it was the, I wouldn't say there was much of a divide.

I can't lie. It was more so just so the people that were middle class gave more of an informed sort of and more sophisticated sort of image of, of, of politics. Whereas those who were more so the people who I knew were working class, they, they had more of a simplistic view of it. For example, I know one guy just really liked Jeremy Corbyn, but didn't know anything about his policies, didn't know anything about, about him as a person or, or anything about the late party. He just really liked Jeremy Corbyn. So yeah.

RESEARCHER : Do you feel like that's more sort of him sort of just reiterating his parents sort of viewpoints? Or do you feel like he just, he genuinely just thought?

ISACK : I don't know. I think it's, I think it was more so just social media at the time, to be honest with you.

RESEARCHER : That's so fair. And did you observe an ethnic minority divide and sort of political engagement in your school? Do you feel like ethnic minority students were more engaged or less engaged?

ISACK : I think, I think ethnic minorities were more engaged because 2010s was a very weird time for sort of race politics, I think. I think, I think, sort of the mid, the mid to late 2020, 2010s, sort of, it was a very, you know, identity politics were the sort of main thing that the people, the people talked about. So like minorities, students, whenever anything, especially black students were very vocal about, about things and like, and that we were very heavy handed on racism and, and all of that stuff. So I'd say that the sort of, black British students were much more involved, I think, than the, than a lot of white students.

RESEARCHER : Okay, that's really interesting. Okay, so now I'm going to do some, to any questions. Is there anything that we haven't covered that you think is important about your experience of citizenship education?

ISACK : Let me think. Yeah, I think, I think we were never really taught how to sort of navigate life after, after school. So I think, I think being taught about, about what comes after school, politically, since then, as sort of how, how government starts to affect us then, that, that should have been, should have been covered, I think.

RESEARCHER : And if you could change, if you could just suggest just one change to improve citizenship education for future students, what would it be and why?

ISACK : Teach people basic economics. Love, God, please. Because, because it generally explains so much about, about how the world works, how, how government impacts you, and, and yeah, how, how, how to live life after, after school.

RESEARCHER : That is the end of our interview. Thank you so much for sharing your experiences and thoughts. Your impact is really, really valuable to this research. So thank you so much.